| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Language and Politics: Framing the Use of Conceptual Metaphors in Political Discourse

Kaoutar Chahbane[1] ✉ and Pr. Hassan Zrizi[2]
[12]*Laboratory of Interdisciplinary Research in Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Mohammedia, Hassan II University, Morocco*
Corresponding Author: Kaoutar Chahbane, **E-mail**: kaoutar.chahbane@uit.ac.ma

| **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the intricate relationship between language and politics through the lens of conceptual metaphors utilized in contemporary political discourse. By analyzing the framing and use of conceptual metaphors in political communication, the study aims to elucidate how language shapes and influences political narratives and ideologies. In this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted, incorporating critical discourse analysis (CDA) to delve into the use of conceptual metaphors in the context of American political discourse, taking as a case study Barack Obama's 2009 Cairo speech and Donald Trump's 2017 Inaugural Address. Drawing upon insights from studies on cognitive linguistics, politics, and discourse analysis, the research investigates the ways in which political actors strategically employ metaphors to construct persuasive arguments, shape public opinion, and advance specific policy agendas. This research thus aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the relation existing between language and political persuasion.

| **KEYWORDS**

Language, Politics, Conceptual Metaphors, Political Discourse

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

1. Introduction

The relationship between language and politics is multifaceted, encompassing not only the overt messaging of political actors but also the nuanced reception and interpretation of the messages by the public. Politics has always been part of human life. In one way or another, everyone is part of the political process and activity. We go even further by saying that every one of us is a politician. Everyone is a politician in the sense that everyone, especially in today's world, is involved in politics, speaks about politics and has a say in what is going on in the political world. Today, great efforts are made in the study of politics. Politics has a substantial role in our daily lives, as it shapes the way we are living and even our own way of thinking.

Thus, politics is studied from different points of view and by different experts of different academic backgrounds. Scholars of language have also dealt with this topic using and following different methodologies in relation to different disciplines (linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, translation...). As mentioned by Chilton and Schäffner (1997), "politics cannot be conducted without language" (p.206). In this sense, "human interaction to a large extent involves language, and linguistic interaction is embedded in and determined by socio-cultural, historical, ideological, and institutional conditions" (Chilton and Schäffner, 1997, p.206).

Conceptual metaphors, rooted in cognitive linguistics, serve as vehicles for conveying complex ideas and values through the use of familiar and relatable imagery, enabling political actors to frame issues, shape public opinion, and advance their agendas in persuasive and impactful ways. This article delves into the relation between language and politics, focusing specifically on the use of conceptual metaphors in contemporary political discourse. By examining the ways in which metaphors are strategically deployed in politics, this study seeks to unravel the underlying mechanisms through which language influences political thought, action, and collective consciousness. Through an exploration of the varied implications and consequences of metaphorical language in political

discourse, this research endeavors to contribute to a deeper understanding of the persuasive power of language and its impact on the target audience.

2. Politics and language

The realm of politics is often perceived as a contest for authority and control, reflecting the clash of social, political, and economic ideologies. Politics is seen as the struggle and fight for power; it is a fight for certain social, political or economic beliefs and ideas. Chilton (2004) distinguishes between two views on politics. The first is that politics is viewed as a 'struggle for power' between two categories: those who seek to maintain it and others who want to 'resist it'. The second view sees politics as 'cooperation', meaning all the 'practices and institutions that a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty, and the like'(Chilton, 2004, 3). Politics then can be seen as a struggle to maintain power or as a group of institutions that are made by society with the purpose of solving problems and avoiding conflicts. Accordingly, politics can be construed as either a quest to sustain authority or as a framework of societal institutions aimed at conflict resolution and prevention.

Language and politics are interdependent, with politics in much need of language than language is of politics since the latter depends greatly on linguistic elements. Politics and language form a bond that is hard to break. Politics is also considered a 'form of action' (Schäffner and Bassnett, 2010, p.3). This is related to the fact that politics influences human life and can even change it. At the core of politics lies the concept of power, which is inherently reliant on language as well as other forms of communication. Language assumes a central position in the political landscape, as effective communication serves as the cornerstone of political engagement, while politics itself is entrenched in decision-making processes, resource management, and the propagation of new values and ideologies.

In politics, everything is planned, and every element is meticulously orchestrated; as Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, "... in politics nothing is accidental. If something happens, be assured it was planned this way" (cited in Álvarez, Fernández-Díaz and Mª Íñigo-Mora, 2009, p.1). A politician needs to follow certain rules while speaking since the language that is used in politics differs from the daily language that we use in daily conversations. They follow these rules since it is a known fact that language can be as powerful and influential as the action itself or even more. Language can also influence people's views of the world. Burkardt (1996) distinguishes between 3 types of political communication. She states that there is:

> "a broad distinction between communicating about politics (e.g. ordinary people in a pub talking about election results), political discourse in mass media, and political communication (i.e. discourse originating in political institutions. More specifically, discourse originating in political institutions can be subdivided into genres that are instrumental in policy-making and thus produced by and addressed to politicians (e.g. manifesto of a political party) and genres that communicate, explain and justify political decisions, produced by politicians and addressed to the general public (e.g. speech at an electioneering campaign, a New Year address by a head of state)" (cited in Schäffner and Bassnett, 2010, p.2-3)

Understanding the nuances within these various forms of political communication is integral to comprehending how information flows within the political landscape, how opinions are shaped, and how decisions are conveyed to the public, ultimately influencing the dynamics of democratic governance and civic engagement. Informal exchanges in everyday settings contribute to the formation of public opinion. These conversations reflect the sentiments, concerns, and values of ordinary citizens, serving as a barometer of the prevailing political climate. While informal, these discussions may influence the direction of political discourse in formal settings. Discourse originating from political institutions is characterized by its formal structure and strategic messaging. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of political discourse, from casual conversations to formal institutional communications, we gain a comprehensive understanding of its various implications in shaping people's opinions and impacting public perception.

3. Political discourse

The study of discourse can give great insights into the structures of society as well as power-relations. When analyzing a text and discourse, language can be more than just a number of linguistic elements but also functions as a tool to understand what goes behind the ideas and elements of a text (its relation with the social and cultural contexts). Fairclough sees discourse as "a complex of 3 elements: social practice, discoursal practice (text production, distribution, and consumption), and text" (2010, p.6). Discourse can be seen, as presented in Hatim and Mason (1997), as a way of speaking with certain characteristics that represent certain social groups and express social ways of living and ways of thinking.

According to Richardson (2008), depending on two different approaches, we can distinguish between two views on this concept: the formalist approach and the functionalist approach. The formalist approach takes into consideration four main characteristics that help in the interpretation of the text, which are cohesion, narrative, causality, and motivation, without taking into account "the

social ideas that inform the way we use and interpret language" (Richardson, 2008, p.22). This latter point is the main focus of the functionalist approach, as it gives importance to the social aspect of our use of language, i.e. the purpose behind using language and what we do with it.

Political discourse is seen as the use of language to speak about politicians, political issues, and the political process. It has various forms and types, including debates, interviews, political roundtables, and others. These types are created in relation to different contexts and situations that are related to the act of politics and the political process (Schäffner and Bassnett, 2010). Political discourse depends on different factors, and its typology and classification or genres are related to the context and situation in which it is produced.

Political language is a type of language for a specific purpose. Political discourse can have different purposes according to the different political situations and activities. This discourse helps in the production of certain power-relations and ideologies. McNair (1999) sees that "... political communication is too important to be ignored by those with a concern for the workings of modern democracies." (p.45).

Political discourse has different functions depending on the different types of discourse and the political context and event in which it exists. It deals mainly with political ideas and any related political subject but refers to different jargon. Discourse Analysis is a broad area of study which is related to various different disciplines, like linguistics, pragmatics, sociology, politics, translation studies, communication studies, and others. Analyzing political discourse can be a hard task for many. Many books have dealt with this subject and attempted to give a clear view of the way discourse, in general, should be analyzed. Many scholars have dealt with this subject from different approaches. Norman Fairclough, for instance, has been investigating, since the 1980s, the different aspects and the interrelated relations between language and power and also between these two elements and society.

Hodges (2008) sees that "Political discourse is marked by the struggle over the representation of ambiguous issues. This competition over the meaning of ambiguous events, people, and objects in the world has been called the politics of representation" (p. 485). This concept is related to the way different issues are represented, which is related to the purpose of the representation as well as the political view and context. This is clearly shown in the media, as well as in political elections and debates, since different channels deal with the same issues differently or in the speeches by different heads of state on particular issues.
In the field of political discourse, "... linguistic resources are selected in terms of their interaction with principles of human behaviour to achieve specified outcomes" (Wilson, 1990, p.18). This explains the interdisciplinary aspect of the field as well as the reason behind the choice of a certain linguistic element by politicians in all the different types of political discourse.

4. Conceptual metaphors

Metaphors are rhetorical devices that are often used in political discourse. In its general definition, a metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them." (Merriam-Webster 2014). It compares two elements like a simile does, but without using 'like' or 'as'. This device works in a way that makes the audience understand one concept, which is often very complicated to understand or just not relatable or clear enough for the targeted audience in terms of another concept. This depends on the understanding of the audience since metaphors cannot achieve their aim or be understood if the audience failed to link those two elements to each other. For this, the audience and the speaker need to share common knowledge and have common experiences.

One type of metaphor that we often use in our daily conversation is what is called 'dead metaphors'. Although they have the same impact and function as other types of metaphors, dead metaphors are expressions that are not very noticeable in language. Examples of these metaphors are found in our language (e.g. you are wasting your time) and are subconsciously impactful since they have a power that we are unaware of. The use of dead metaphors can sometimes serve to obscure the true meaning of a message, as they can be interpreted literally rather than as intended. This can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations, particularly in sensitive or crucial political discussions.

Metaphors make political discourse more 'persuasive', and that happens when "metaphors interact with other linguistic features to legitimise policies" (Chateris-Black, 2005, p. 17). Metaphors have the power to influence the thoughts of the targeted audience, and they can completely change the way we see the world and our opinions on certain issues. Thus, their use is somehow essential in the language that politicians use.   One of the aims of the use of metaphors is oversimplification, and that is to make certain issues clearer in the mind of the targeted audience.

Cognitive linguistics focuses on different but limited types of metaphors, and conceptual metaphors are one of them. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is a theory that links metaphors to the cognitive aspect. This theory sees metaphors not just as a literary device or an unusual tool that is not often used but as a 'cognitive mechanism' that is part of our thinking and that "plays a central

role in thought, and is indispensable to both thought and language" (Deignan, 2005, p.4). This theory was first introduced and elaborated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their *Metaphors We Live By*. It was also discussed by Kövecses (2002) and some other cognitive linguists. Lakoff and Johnson considered that metaphors are part of our everyday language; they shape our cognition, and so they are part of the cognitive processes that link two domains (the known and the conceptual). Conceptual metaphors help in clarifying abstract ideas by means of concrete elements. This makes it easy for us to understand abstract notions by explaining them through what we have experienced. Metaphors can also reveal "a shared system of belief as to what the world is, and culture-specific beliefs about mankind's place in it" (Charteris-Black, 2007, p. 43).

Many times, we do not see the impact of metaphors in political discourses, and this can influence our minds unconsciously. Conceptual metaphors influence the thoughts of the target audience since they perceive them unconsciously. Lakoff also looked at the relations between politics and metaphors in his *Moral Politics* (2002). Metaphors also help in the creation of "a common ground between the speaker and the listener based on what is assumed to be or presented as shared experience" (Munday 2012: 57).

5. Methodology:

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore the use of conceptual metaphors in political discourse. The analysis focused on identifying and interpreting the underlying metaphors employed by political figures in American political discourse. Specifically, the research focused on the detailed examination of two significant speeches: Barack Obama's 2009 Cairo speech and Donald Trump's 2017 Inaugural Address. The analysis involved a systematic review of linguistic structures and rhetorical strategies, aiming to identify and interpret the conceptual metaphors embedded within the speeches. This study drew on theoretical frameworks from cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive and discursive dimensions of political metaphors. By analyzing the role of conceptual metaphors in political discourse, this research aimed to contribute to a deeper comprehension of their influence on public perceptions and the construction of political ideologies.

6. Discussion:

The analysis of specific metaphors employed by Barack Obama and Donald Trump reveals how these metaphors are strategically crafted to evoke certain emotions, values, and sentiments within the broader context of national identity, unity, and global positioning.

Types of conceptual metaphors	Description	Examples in American political discourse
Ontological Metaphors	These metaphors create essential connections between abstract ideas and real-life encounters, assisting in the understanding of complex concepts that are not easily tangible (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).	Trump's "Make America Great Again" and "America is a nation with a proud history" illustrate the use of the nation as a living organism, aiming to evoke a sense of collective identity and unity among the American people.
Structural Metaphors	These metaphors draw parallels between the structure of one domain and that of another, facilitating the comprehension of complex ideas through familiar structural patterns. (Kövecses, 2000)	Trump's "Rebuild America" campaign was used to represent his plans for revitalizing the country's infrastructure, economy, and global standing. The metaphor was used to emphasize his focus on improving the nation's economic and social structures.
Orientation Metaphors	These metaphors rely on spatial orientations, such as up-down, front-back, and in-out, to convey abstract concepts related to power, emotion, and morality (Gibbs, 1994).	Obama's "bridges between communities" is an orientation metaphor emphasizing the need for building bridges between different communities and fostering understanding and collaboration: "All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart or whether we commit ourselves to an

		effort – a sustained effort – to find common ground."
Metaphor Clusters	Metaphor clusters consist of interconnected metaphors within a specific conceptual domain, forming a network of related metaphors that collectively contribute to the understanding of a particular concept (Steen, 1999).	Obama's references to America as a "beacon of hope" interconnected with the idea of the nation as a "shining city upon a hill," creating a cluster of metaphors that underscored the nation's role as a symbol of freedom and opportunity for people around the world.
Ontological Blending	The concept of ontological blending involves amalgamating multiple conceptual domains to form fresh conceptual frameworks, thereby assisting in the comprehension of complex or abstract ideas (introduced by Fauconnier and Turner, 2002).	Trump's slogan "America First" exemplifies this blending, combining the ideas of national pride, protectionism, and prioritization of domestic interests.

Table 1: Conceptual Metaphors in American Political Discourse: Types and Examples

The table offers a comprehensive description of each type of conceptual metaphor, highlighting its key characteristics and its application in political discourse. The table includes specific examples drawn from Barack Obama's 2009 Cairo speech and Donald Trump's 2017 Inaugural Address. Conceptual metaphors serve as fundamental cognitive tools, enabling individuals to grasp complex or abstract ideas by associating them with more concrete experiences. Scholars in the field of cognitive linguistics have identified several distinct types of conceptual metaphors, each playing a unique role in shaping human understanding. These include ontological metaphors, structural metaphors, and orientation metaphors. Additionally, metaphor clusters, as emphasized by Steen (1999), consist of interconnected metaphors within a specific conceptual domain, forming a network of related metaphors that collectively contribute to the comprehension of a particular concept. Lastly, ontological blending, introduced by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), involves the integration of multiple conceptual domains to create novel conceptual structures that facilitate the understanding of complex or abstract ideas. Understanding these diverse types of conceptual metaphors is crucial for gaining insights into the intricate ways in which language and thought interact to shape human cognition and communication.

As demonstrated in the table, the analysis of these conceptual metaphors shows how political actors harness the symbolic power of language to convey their policy agendas and political ideologies. Metaphors such as "America as a beacon of hope" or "Make America Great Again" evoke strong emotional responses and foster a sense of collective identity and national pride among the public. These sets of metaphors, albeit with differing ideological underpinnings, demonstrate the power of language in political communication. They showcase how conceptual metaphors can be wielded to construct and reinforce political ideologies, evoke emotional responses, and galvanize public support. These metaphors serve as powerful rhetorical tools, framing political narratives and influencing public perception in line with these leaders' visions for the nation.

The critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the aforementioned instances accentuates the deliberate deployment of conceptual metaphors as effective tools for persuasion within the realm of political communication. It elucidates how these metaphors function not merely as linguistic tools but as potent instruments for crafting tailored narratives and reinforcing specific political ideologies. These metaphors also contribute to the construction of a shared national narrative that resonates with the values and aspirations of the American people. The careful selection and framing of metaphors allow political figures to convey complex ideas in simple, relatable terms, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of their policy positions and ideological stances. Moreover, the examination of these metaphors within the context of political language sheds light on how political rhetoric can be employed to mobilize support, inspire collective action, and shape the socio-political landscape of the nation.

The pervasive use of metaphors in political discourse not only aids in the comprehension of complex political ideas but also shapes the broader narrative and values of a political movement or party. By weaving metaphors into their speeches and communication, politicians can inspire, motivate, and mobilize the public toward a common goal, fostering a sense of collective purpose and unity.

7. Conclusion
Starting from the assumption that 'politics cannot be conducted without language' (Chilton and Schäffner, 1997, p.206), this study is an attempt to link these two fields and show how they can benefit from one another. It also encourages more research in these

areas of study, both combined and separated. Unlike many other disciplines, linguistics as an example, discourse analysis is still not very focused on politics. The examination of discourse provides valuable insights into the underlying structures of society and the dynamics of power relations within it. In delving into the analysis of political discourse, language assumes a multifaceted role, extending beyond a mere collection of linguistic elements. It serves as a potent instrument for unraveling the intricate layers of meaning and the complexities that underlie the ideas and components within a text. Conceptual metaphors occupy a central position within political discourse, as well as discourse in a broader sense. As shown, conceptual metaphors serve to render political communication more accessible, relatable, and enduring. They operate as vehicles for imparting specific emotions, prompting a reevaluation of certain issues, or influencing the perception of political figures. Through the strategic deployment of these metaphors, political discourse can be infused with an evocative force that resonates with the targeted audience, stirring their emotions and inspiring their engagement. It is a strategy that is often used by many politicians in many cultures, as it helps the targeted audience understand the decisions made and policies. The use of these conceptual metaphors by Trump and Obama demonstrates how political leaders strategically utilize language to evoke specific emotions, shape public perceptions, and reinforce their political narratives within the broader context of national identity, unity, and global positioning.

While this study sheds light on the influential role of conceptual metaphors in political discourse, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research takes as a case study the use of conceptual metaphors by the two presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader global context. To build upon this study, future research could consider conducting comparative analyses across various political leaders and cultures to understand the universality and evolution of the use of conceptual metaphors. This study also serves as a catalyst for further research in the field, advocating for a more comprehensive exploration of the subject through the lens of cognitive linguistics. A deeper examination of how the target audience perceives and interprets conceptual metaphors in politics could provide invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics of political communication.

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